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ABSTRACT

A pilot study was conducted on the student characteristics associated with changes in student writing apprehension. Data were collected from 300 students in freshman composition courses and 300 students in advanced (junior year) composition courses. These students completed the Writing Attitude Questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of their writing courses. No significant differences in initial (pretest) writing apprehension were found for men and women, for students in freshman versus junior courses, or for different college majors. Comparisons of pretests with posttests revealed significant reductions in student writing apprehension, regardless of student's college major, course level, and sex. A positive relationship was found between writing apprehension and the amount of writing that students anticipated in their chosen careers. There was a decrease from pretest to posttest in the percentage of students with high writing apprehension scores and increases in the percentages of both students with moderate writing apprehension and students with low writing apprehension. (RL)

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Measuring Writing Apprehension in Required Freshman Composition and Upper-Level Writing Courses

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Risky as it is to generalize, it is fair to say that writing teachers are excited about the changes in teaching composition that we have seen in recent years. From talking to our colleagues, from reviewing textbooks, from reading recent research, from attending conferences, we can see the distance we have come. We have moved from teaching students to write a five-paragraph theme in a set pattern to teaching them how to solve writing problems; we have moved away from the English teacher as audience to the real world as audience; we have moved away from the class in which the English teacher is sole judge and authority to the class in which students help one another to develop and edit their papers; we have replaced the textbooks written for teachers with texts written for students.

In every case, the move is away from classroom writing toward real world writing, away from writing that is only "good" and toward writing that is also interesting. And in every case, we are seeing dramatically improved writing. The only changes more exciting that those we have already made, surely, are those that are still to come. One of those changes underway is our growing awareness of the need to recognize our students as whole persons--the need to recognize the relationship between their attitudes toward the writing process and their ability to perform as writers.

Already we are seeing hints of this growing awareness in textbooks. It is not uncommon, for example, for an author to

talk in a prefatory comment about recognizing a student's fears or building a student's confidence. One author reminds the teacher that "The batter who fears a batting slump has taken the first step toward that slump. In writing, as in sports, performing well demands confidence."[1] Another author remarks in a comment to students, "many writers--especially inexperienced writers--share a common fear: a fear of writing."[2] Thanks largely to the research carried out by John Daly and his associates, we are now beginning to do more than acknowledge writing anxiety; we are beginning to measure it and to examine the relation it may bear on writing performance.[3]

It is this kind of investigation--advancing our knowledge about the link between writing attitude and performance--that we are now carrying out at the University of Maryland, College Park. Our University has, in addition to its long-standing Freshman Composition Program, a Junior Composition Program that it inaugurated at the beginning of this academic year. Every student who has earned a minimum of 56 credits is required to take a semester of either English 391, "Advanced Composition," or English 393, "Technical Writing," both of which are designed to offer pre-professional writing instruction. What this means is that every student graduating from the University of Maryland, College Park, will have taken two required writing courses--one at the freshman level (English 101 or its equivalent) and one at the junior level.

It also means that 5000 students are enrolled in a composition course every semester: 3000 in freshman composition and 2000 in junior composition. Given this two-course re-

quirement, given the large number of students enrolled, and given the absence of any definitive studies which assess writing growth at the college level, we are undertaking a research project whose purpose is to investigate and to trace the development of the relationship between writing attitude and writing performance of college-level students. During the next three academic years (1981-83), approximately 30,000 students will produce a writing sample at the beginning and end of each required writing course; that will provide 60,000 samples. The same students will also respond to a writing attitude questionnaire at the beginning and end of each semester, providing 60,000 questionnaires. We will then computerize and statistically analyze not only the results of the writing samples and the questionnaires but also the relationship between them (and, additionally, a number of relevant demographic data, e.g., sex, age, major). Because it is highly probable that this data base will contain information about students who are typical of other large institutions, we hope to describe the growth in college-level writing not only of Maryland students but of other university populations as well.

During the current academic year we have conducted a pilot study, and it is the purpose of this paper to share with you our findings in the area of writing apprehension. We have sought to answer three basic questions: 1) Do composition students show a significant change in writing apprehension from the beginning of the semester to its end? 2) How might writing apprehension (and the amount of writing a student expects to do in his career, after graduation)

be related to the student's sex, profile (English 101, English 391, or English 393), or division of the University in which he is enrolled? 3) What is the relationship between a student's level of writing apprehension and the amount of writing he expects to do in a career?

To assess writing apprehension, we used the Writing Attitude Questionnaire (Appendix A), a version of the Writing Apprehension Test (developed by Daly and Miller) to which we have added three items of particular interest to our research.[4] The questionnaire consists of twenty-nine Likert-type items (scorable on a 1-to-5 scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), yielding a total score which may range from 29--high apprehensive--to 145--highly confident. Item #30, "The writing requirements of my job will be very great," measures the amount of career writing anticipated by the student, and its score may range from 1--little expected on-the-job writing--to 5--much expected on-the-job writing. Item #31 reports the division of the University where the student's major is found, as follows: (1) Agricultural and Life Sciences, (2) Arts and Humanities, (3) Behavioral and Social Sciences, (4) Human and Community Resources, or (5) Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Engineering. At the top of the questionnaire, students indicate their sex.

Our findings are based on a sample drawn from 600 students enrolled during the 1980 Fall Semester as follows--300 in Freshman Composition (randomly drawn from 23 sections of English 101) and 300 in Junior Composition (150 randomly drawn from 17 sections of English 391 and 150 randomly

drawn from English 393). Using the identification numbers (at the top of the questionnaires), we matched the questionnaire that students completed at the beginning of the semester (pre-) with that which they completed at its end (post-). We thus started with 1200 Writing Attitude Questionnaires, 600 from the beginning of the semester and 600 from the end. After scoring the questionnaires and having the raw data keypunched onto IBM cards, we proceeded, with the aid of a statistical consultant at the University's Computer Science Center, to decide how to best set up and analyze the data in order to answer our research questions. Due to missing data, we ended up with a sample of 547 students--257 in English 101, 144 in English 391, and 146 in English 393; 285 females and 262 males; and 67 Division 1 Students, 129 Division 2, 171 Division 3, 54 Division 4, and 126 Division 5. (Specific cell sizes appear in Appendices B and C).

We looked first at the writing apprehension scores, performing analysis of variance and covariance including repeated measures tests (program BMDP2V) to discover that regardless of sex, profile, or division (the three independent variables we established for this pilot study), all of our subjects were statistically equal on the initial (pre-ap.) scores. Phrasing that another way, we found there was no statistically significant difference between levels of initial apprehension for men and women, for students of English 101, 391, 393, or for students in the various divisions of the University, for the probability of our findings in each case exceeded the .05 at which we had set alpha.

Given that equal starting point, we looked to see what

changes had occurred and whether they were dependent on any one or more of the three independent variables. With alpha again set at .05, we found that the reduction in writing apprehension experienced by all of our composition students, overall, was statistically significant, independent of sex, profile, or division. These findings are summarized in Figure I., below, and additional details appear in Appendix B.

Figure I.
Writing Apprehension Mean Scores

	ENGL 101	ENGL 391 & 393	OVERALL
Pre-Ap.	95.75	99.43	97.86
Post-Ap.	98.11	103.55	100.83

Looking at the career writing expectations, we found no statistically significant differences in the amount of writing students expected when we compared them with one another (using our independent variables) and when we compared the scores from the beginning of the semester (pre-car) with those from the end (post-car). Simply by comparing the raw data, however, one can see differences: students whose majors are in the arts and humanities (Division 2), for instance, scored an end-of-the-semester mean of 3.57, while Division 5 students, in mathematics and the physical sciences and engineering scored 2.94. Additional details appear in Appendix C, though uneven cell size confounds their interpretation in any final way.

Program BMDP1R enabled us to explore the relationship between writing apprehension and the amount of writing one an-

ticipates in one's career. We found this relationship to be positive, with the correlation coefficient (for the entire sample) for the pre-semester career writing expectations and pre-semester writing apprehension being .29 and for the same post-semester measures being .27, as Appendix D summarizes. Correlations for our independent variables--sex, profile, and division--are summarized in Appendices E, F, and G, respectively. Occasionally, interesting findings emerge; e.g., the correlation coefficient for pre-ap./pre-car. ranges from .16 to .37 along divisional lines (Appendix G), and the post-ap./post-car correlation according to profile ranges from .22 to .37 (Appendix F).

Returning to the writing apprehension data and basing our figures on the normal distribution curve for these data, we set scores of 80 and below as "high anxiety," of 114 and above as "low anxiety," and of all of those in between as "moderate anxiety." We found that at the beginning of the semester (pre-ap.), 21.8% of all students were highly anxious, 62.5% were moderately anxious, and 15.8% had low anxiety. On the end-of-the-semester questionnaire, the percentage of highly anxious students dropped from 21.8% to 17.6%; the percentage of moderately anxious students rose from 62.5% to 64.5%; and the percentage of those with low anxiety increased from 15.6% to 17.8%. With the decrease in the percentage of people with high anxiety and the increase in the percentage of people with low anxiety, these two groups were almost perfectly balanced in the end-of-the-semester findings: 17.6% had high anxiety; 17.8% had low anxiety, leaving 64.5% of the

sample with a moderate level of anxiety. In other words, most of our composition students began and ended their writing course with a moderate level of anxiety. The next step in our research will be to examine the relationships between attitude and performance. Perhaps in fact we will find that just as a moderate level of anxiety can contribute to the success of professional writers, moderate anxiety may coincide with, rather than stand apart from, marked success in students' performance as writers.

While we do not want to suggest that our findings are in any way conclusive, they certainly indicate that research in writing apprehension is worth further time and effort, either to confirm what we have found or to disprove it. As writing teachers, we as a profession have taken many steps in recent years toward becoming better teachers. We at Maryland see our research in writing--and we invite you to share this attitude with us--as a continuing stage in our development as teachers, as another instance of our conviction that to the student and to his or her many needs, attention must be paid.

Appendix A

COURSE _____ SECTION _____ STUDENT S.S.# _____ AGE ____ SEX ____

WRITING ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Below is a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Are Uncertain, (2) Disagree, or (1) Strongly Disagree. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, please respond to all of them. Please circle the correct number. Thank you.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I avoid writing.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I look forward to writing down my ideas.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Taking a writing course is a very frightening experience.	5	4	3	2	1
6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good.	5	4	3	2	1
7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for publication.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I like to write my ideas down.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing clearly.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I like my friends to read what I write.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I'm nervous about writing.	5	4	3	2	1
14. People seem to enjoy what I write.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I enjoy writing.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	5	4	3	2	1
17. Writing is a lot of fun.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I expect to do poorly in writing classes even before I enter them.	5	4	3	2	1
19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	5	4	3	2	1
20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.	5	4	3	2	1
21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a writing course.	5	4	3	2	1
22. When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.	5	4	3	2	1
23. It's easy for me to write a good composition.	5	4	3	2	1
24. I don't think I write as well as most other people.	5	4	3	2	1
25. I don't like my composition to be evaluated.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I'm no good at writing.	5	4	3	2	1
27. My high school preparation in writing was excellent.	5	4	3	2	1
28. Writing courses are a waste of time.	5	4	3	2	1
29. Only English majors should be required to take this writing course.	5	4	3	2	1
30. The writing requirements of my job will be very great.	5	4	3	2	1

31. The Division of the University where my major is found is: (circle)

1. Agric. & Life Science
2. Arts & Humanities
3. Behav. & Soc. Sci.
4. Hum. & Comm. Resources
5. Math & Phys. Sci. and Engineering

Appendix B

Cell Means for Apprehension Scores

	English 101		English 391		English 393	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	(n=19)	(n=14)	(n=7)	(n=21)	(n=3)	(n=3)
pre-ap.	94.89	102.57	99.42	101.00	97.67	96.00
Division 1						
post-ap.	99.00	101.57	109.00	104.43	101.33	106.33
	(n=25)	(n=20)	(n=12)	(n=4)	(n=44)	(n=24)
pre-ap.	107.52	95.55	100.25	108.50	101.47	105.50
Division 2						
post-ap.	106.20	99.40	102.17	108.50	98.93	105.46
	(n=31)	(n=37)	(n=30)	(n=31)	(n=20)	(n=22)
pre-ap.	97.70	99.59	97.13	96.90	94.35	100.18
Division 3						
post-ap.	98.13	102.05	103.07	105.58	100.55	103.95
	(n=14)	(n=5)	(n=7)	(n=3)	(n=20)	(n=5)
pre-ap.	99.92	89.20	96.14	98.00	95.40	100.80
Division 4						
post-ap.	101.07	96.80	101.57	105.67	99.05	106.20
	(n=22)	(n=70)	(n=7)	(n=22)	(n=1)	(n=4)
pre-ap.	93.64	89.60	94.28	95.27	112.00	86.25
Division 5						
post-ap.	95.64	93.74	101.43	98.04	105.00	96.25

Summary (N=547)

Pre-Apprehension Score Mean = 97.56 (S.D. = 15.62)
Post-Apprehension Score Mean= 100.57 (S.D. = 17.54)

Appendix C

Cell Means for Career Writing Scores

	English 101		English 391		English 393	
	Male (n=19)	Female (n=14)	Male (n=7)	Female (n=21)	Male (n=3)	Female (n=3)
pre-car.	3.16	3.50	3.28	3.76	4.0	2.66
Division 1						
post-car.	3.21	3.28	4.0	3.71	4.0	3.00
	(n=25)	(n=20)	(n=12)	(n=4)	(n=44)	(n=24)
pre-car.	3.28	3.40	4.00	4.50	3.68	3.58
Division 2						
post-car.	3.60	3.00	4.00	4.25	3.50	3.83
	(n=31)	(n=37)	(n=30)	(n=31)	(n=20)	(n=22)
pre-car.	3.30	3.30	3.66	3.58	3.30	3.18
Division 3						
post-car.	2.96	3.16	3.86	3.51	3.55	3.64
	(n=14)	(n=5)	(n=7)	(n=3)	(n=20)	(n=5)
pre-car.	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.66	3.20	3.20
Division 4						
post-car.	3.35	3.60	3.57	3.33	3.15	3.40
	(n=22)	(n=70)	(n=7)	(n=22)	(n=1)	(n=4)
pre-car.	2.86	2.91	4.28	3.27	4.0	3.00
Division 5						
post-car.	3.13	2.63	3.85	3.50	2.00	3.00

Summary (N=547)

Pre-Career Writing Score Mean= 3.33 (S. D. = 1.21)
Post-Career Writing Score Mean= 3.35 (S. D. = 1.05)

Appendix D

Comprehensive
Correlation Matrix

	Sex	Pre-Ap.	Pre-Car.	Post-Ap.	Post-Car.	Division	Profile
Sex	1.00						
Pre-Ap.	-.05	1.00					
Pre-Car.	-.05	.29	1.00				
Post-Ap.	.00	.68	.26	1.00			
Post-Car.	.09	.17	.41	.27	1.00		
Division	.16	-.19	-.13	.15	-.18	1.00	
Profile	-.13	.08	.14	.08	.19	-.21	1.00

Appendix E

Correlation Matrix
(By Sex)

	Pre-Car.	Post-Car.	Pre-Ap.	Post-Ap.
Male	1.00			
Pre-Car.				
Female	1.00			
Male	.45	1.00		
Post-Car.				
Female	.35	1.00		
Male	.26	.13	1.00	
Pre-Ap.				
Female	.28	.24	1.00	
Male	.27	.24	.70	1.00
Post-Ap.				
Female	.22	.33	.66	1.00

Appendix F

Correlation Matrix
(By Profile)

	Pre-Car.	Post-Car.	Pre-Ap.	Post-Ap.
ENGL 101	1.00			
Pre-Car.				
ENGL 391	1.00			
ENGL 393	1.00			
ENGL 101	.36	1.00		
Post-Car.				
ENGL 391	.40	1.00		
ENGL 393	.60	1.00		
ENGL 101	.30	.26	1.00	
Pre-Ap.				
ENGL 391	.29	.19	1.00	
ENGL 393	.22	.19	1.00	
ENGL 101	.29	.30	.67	1.00
Post-Ap.				
ENGL 391	.19	.22	.69	1.00
ENGL 393	.19	.37	.68	1.00

Appendix G

Correlation Matrix
(By Division)

		Pre-Car.	Post-Car.	Pre-Ap.	Post-Ap.
Pre-Car.	Div.1	1.00			
	Div.2	1.00			
	Div.3	1.00			
	Div.4	1.00			
	Div.5	1.00			
Post-Car.	Div.1	.33	1.00		
	Div.2	.45	1.00		
	Div.3	.50	1.00		
	Div.4	.66	1.00		
	Div.5	.34	1.00		
Pre-Ap.	Div.1	.26	.06	1.00	
	Div.2	.31	.17	1.00	
	Div.3	.16	.20	1.00	
	Div.4	.31	.15	1.00	
	Div.5	.37	.22	1.00	
Post-Ap.	Div.1	.17	.19	.56	1.00
	Div.2	.28	.31	.65	1.00
	Div.3	.20	.34	.77	1.00
	Div.4	.36	.19	.57	1.00
	Div.5	.29	.26	.67	1.00

Notes

[1] Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, The Art of Writing (Sherman Oaks, California: Alfred, 1981), p. xiii.

[2] Dean Memering and Frank O'Hare, The Writer's Work (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. ix.

[3] See, for example, John A. Daly and Michael D. Miller, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension, Research in the Teaching of English, 9 (1975), 242-49.

[4] Items 27-29 have been added.